



Report reveals dramatic decline in illegal logging in tropical forest nations

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The most thorough assessment to date of the global fight against illegal logging, released by Chatham House today, finds that a decade of international effort to tackle the problem is having a dramatic and beneficial effect both on forest dependent communities and on the global climate. According to the report, "Illegal Logging and Related Trade: Indicators of the Global Response", total global production of illegal timber has fallen by 22 per cent since 2002.

"Up to a billion of the world's poorest people are dependent on forests, and reductions in [illegal logging](#) are helping to protect their livelihoods", said Sam Lawson, Chatham House Associate Fellow and lead author of the report.

The report states that illegal logging has dropped by 50 per cent in Cameroon, by between 50 and 75 per cent in the [Brazilian Amazon](#), and by 75 per cent in Indonesia in the last decade. This reduction, documented in three of the five tropical timber producers studied, has prevented the degradation of up to 17 million hectares of forest, an area larger than England and Wales combined.

By preventing [forest degradation](#), which is often the first step towards [forest destruction](#), efforts to tackle illegal logging in these three countries may over time help prevent - at relatively low cost - the release of up to 14.6 billion tonnes of carbon dioxide - the equivalent of half the carbon dioxide released by human actions worldwide each year. Conversely, if the timber were harvested under government auspices an estimated \$6.5 billion dollars could be raised in these countries alone, more than twice that which the world spends each year in overseas aid for primary school education.

The new report covers all aspects of the timber trade—a journey that starts in the forests of five "producer" countries studied: Brazil, Indonesia, Cameroon, Malaysia and Ghana. The study analyses the entry of timber into markets in the five "consumer" countries—the United States, Japan, the United Kingdom, France and the Netherlands, as well as through the ports and factories of two "processing" countries—China and Vietnam—and from there to buyers in the industrialized world.

Despite the dramatic decline, the report says that illegal logging remains a major problem. As the more overt instances of illegal forest sector activity are addressed, less-easily detected, and therefore more intractable, illegal practices are becoming more significant. For example, companies with legal harvesting licenses may log outside the permitted area. Licenses to clear forest for agricultural plantations are also often issued illegally.

In 2008, companies in the United States, Japan, the UK, France and the Netherlands bought 17 million

cubic meters of illegal timber and wood products worth around US\$8.4 billion, most of it entering those nations in the form of processed products like plywood and furniture, mainly from China. In 2009, a total of 100 million cubic metres of illegal timber were harvested in the timber producing countries studied.

"If laid end to end the illegal logs would encircle the globe more than ten times over," according to Larry MacFaul, co-author of the report.

Although the implementation of necessary regulations and policies in producer countries remains mostly poor, a number of significant improvements in laws and regulations are now underway as a result of the negotiation of Voluntary Partnership Agreements with EU. Such agreements have already proved effective, according to the report. Further, in 2008, the US became the first country to introduce legislation to make it illegal to handle illegally harvested timber. There are early indications that the new law is already placing pressure on timber producers and processors around the world to police their supply chains.

"The effort to combat illegal logging and improve forest governance has brought developed and developing countries together in a unique way with a shared sense of purpose", said Lawson. "Our study shows that consumer interest and pressure combined with action by producer countries can yield very positive results.

Provided by Burness Communications

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